

# Childcare Opinions Project: Race and Children's Ages Related to Women's Perceptions of Appropriate Childcare



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## Introduction

The U.S. has the largest prison population in the world. Currently, women make up 5% of the prison and jail population. An estimated 75-80% of incarcerated women have children under the age of 18. These women face overwhelming challenges upon reentry into the community, including the struggle to regain custody of their minor children while balancing the demands of the criminal justice system and community life. Prison and jail parenting education programs are inadequate and inadequately available for preparing women to reenter and successfully negotiate the demands of the child welfare system and custodial family members in order to regain custody of their children. This study focuses on incarcerated women's opinions on appropriate childcare, using the Childcare Opinions Questionnaire (COQ). This study also looks to establish test-retest reliability of the COQ as a valid research tool for future research.

## Research Questions

- (1) Is race related to mothers' perceptions of appropriate child care?
- (2) Does the amount of time away from her child relate to women's perception of appropriate child care?
- (3) Does the age of her children relate to mothers' perceptions of appropriate child care?

## Methods

**Research Design:** This is a sub-study of a larger cross-sectional study that compares opinions of incarcerated women, their children's caregivers, and child welfare workers. This study also used a short-term longitudinal (one month) test-retest reliability design with a subset of mothers.

**Participants:** Participants were recruited from seven jails and prisons across the state of Ohio. The total number of women recruited was 101. In this sample, 72% were self-described as White and Non-Hispanic, 25% as African American, and 3% as "other race/ ethnicity."

**Measures:** Data were collected using the Childcare Opinions Questionnaire (COQ) and a brief demographics survey. The COQ measured mothers' opinions about what care situations are and are not likely to be detrimental to a typical 6 year old child's health and well-being. Women were asked to rate 67 different items on a 5 point scale, ranging from not serious (unlikely to endanger the child's health and well-being) to very serious (unquestionably will endanger the child's health and well-being).

**Key Variables:** From previous research, it was found that the items on the COQ factor into nine different components (Rose & Meezan, 1993). These components are: Inadequate Food, Inadequate Clothing, Inadequate Shelter, Inadequate Supervision, Inadequate Medical Care, Inadequate Emotional Care, Inadequate Education, Exploitation, and Exposure to Unwholesome Circumstances. Women's scores on each of these nine components were calculated by totaling their responses to each item in a category and dividing it by the number of items in the category (mean calculations).

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## Results

- Race was significantly related on one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) in to mothers' scores in two components: Unwholesome Circumstances ( $F(1, 94) = 5.924, p = 0.017$ ) and Inadequate Medical Care ( $F(1, 96) = 5.022, p = 0.027$ )—African American's scores were significantly higher than White and Non-Hispanic's scores in these two areas.
- There were no significant correlations ( $r$ ) between scores and the amount of time a woman has spent away from her children.
- Age category of a mother's children was found on ANOVAs to be significantly related to scores in the following categories: Unwholesome Circumstances ( $F(1, 94) = 5.536, p = 0.021$ ) and Inadequate Education ( $F(1, 98) = 9.786, p = 0.002$ ). At Time 2, ANOVA results were significant for Unwholesome Circumstances ( $F(1, 30) = 4.695, p = 0.038$ ), Inadequate Emotional Care ( $F(1, 28) = 6.315, p = 0.018$ ), Inadequate Education ( $F(1, 30) = 4.302, p = 0.047$ ), and Exploitation ( $F(1, 30) = 5.895, p = 0.021$ ). Women who had at least one child age 6 or over had means on the different components that were significantly higher (representing more serious concerns) than women who had all of their children under the age of 6.
- Inter-item Reliability (Cronbach's Alpha) values were 0.56 to 0.89 for items in the 9 components, most being in the very good reliability range.
- Test-Retest Reliability: Intra-class correlations (ICC) were computed for each of the 9 components. The ICC statistics ranged from 0.408 to 0.753 indicating a greater degree of variability than desirable across the two test administrations.

## Implications

This research shows that women's opinions on appropriate childcare differ in some areas across race and vary according to the age of the mother's children. Prison parenting programs do not often address the cultural concerns or issues that these women face. Child welfare workers may not be adequately trained on these issues and aspects of cultural diversity. More reliability exploration needs to be conducted with this instrument. This research can inform parenting programs and child welfare workers who work with reentering women and their children.